



**OSCE PA President Christine Muttonen (MP, Austria)**  
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*Special Debate: Protecting human rights in times of crisis*

Several horrifying terrorist attacks have shocked the OSCE area over the past year.

Since being elected President of the Assembly just six months ago, I have had to issue statements of condemnation and condolences regarding horrible acts of extremist violence carried out throughout the OSCE region as well as regarding the ongoing violence in Ukraine. Several of our partners for co-operation greatly suffered as well.

In a security environment where such threats are all too real, there is a growing sense of anxiety among our populations. And there is an expectation from our citizens that their governments take action to keep them safe.

But is hyper-securitization of our countries a solution?

While we have a duty to ensure that our citizens can live their lives in peace and security, our efforts must be proportionate. We also must ensure that security measures are not counter-productive, that they don't serve to radicalize our youth by marginalizing them or by unfairly targeting whole groups of people.

We hear too many comments from leaders across the OSCE area – from east to west, north to south – calling for more government powers, less oversight of intelligence services, for restricting individual rights, for bypassing courts, targeting migrants and refugees, even justifications offered for torturing suspected terrorists. We see restrictions placed on journalists and the curtailment of free speech.

These cannot become acceptable practices.

If we surrender our values, not only do we lose the moral high ground and the battle for hearts and minds that is essential to countering violent extremism, but we essentially forfeit the foundations of civilization itself, and ultimately our very security.

What do we have left, if we don't have fundamental freedoms and human rights?

We must instead find a comprehensive, effective and sustainable way to uphold security and protect human rights in times of crisis.

The OSCE and its Parliamentary Assembly are well-suited to address this issue because of our comprehensive approach tackling all three dimensions of security. The strength of our input is the fact that it is multi-dimensional – touching on hard security, economics, environmental challenges, human rights and humanitarian questions.

The OSCE itself can and must do more in all of these dimensions. We have the potential, and so we need to find solutions of how to activate it. I look forward to hearing from all of you and encourage us to have a productive, results-oriented dialogue.

We have the distinct privilege of having with us today Mr. Michael Link, our fellow parliamentarian and Director of ODIHR.

We look forward to your remarks and ideas, which will be an ideal way to open our debate. The floor is yours.